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AUTHOR	Bowie, Joseph A., Jr.; Kahn, Arnold
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ABSTRACT

Group members tend to like other members of their own group more than members of groups to which they do not belong. This paper focuses on some of the initial determinants of this own-group preference and on the isolation of factors which increase or decrease it. The major finding appears to be that the mere anticipation of cooperation or competition can affect "own group bias" (OGB). The finding that those subjects in groups anticipating cooperation also showed a significant OGB effect offers further support for the balance theory interpretation that classification as a member of one group along with exclusion from another is sufficient to produce OGB. However, this study does not lend insight into Rabbie and Horwitz's (1969) failure to find OGB as a function of classification along, and their explanation that it may be due to the failure to provide justification for the division into groups remains plausible. (Author/TA)

Own Group Bias: Determining the Minimal Conditions

Joseph A. Bowie, Jr. Arnold Kahn

Iowa State University

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Perhaps one of the most well-founded generalizations in social psychology is that people who are physically close to one another and have an opportunity to interact tend to like one another more than others who are physically distant and for whom interaction is rare. Such findings are easily generated from a number of theories, such as the consistancy models of Heider (1958) and Newcomb (1953) and the exchange framework of Thibaut and Kelley (1959). A similar tendency is found for groups. Group members tend to like other members of their own group more than members of groups to which they do not belong. This paper focuses on some of the initial determinants of this own-group preference, and the isolation of factors which increase or decrease it. We have labeled this phenomenon "own-group bias" (OGB) and define it as "a tendency for group members to evaluate their own group, other members of their group, and products of their group positively; while evaluating other groups, their members and products, unfavorably" (Ryen & Kahn, 1970).

Minimal Conditions for OGB

Research by a number of investigators have found that the mere act of classifying people as a member of a group is sufficient to produce OGB (Mann, 1961; Ryen, 1970; Ryen & Kahn, 1970; Sample & Botto, 1969). For example, Sample and Botto found that while interaction with own-group members increased OGB, a significant OGB effect occurred prior to interpersonal contact with either own-or other-group members. That is, a preference for one's own group occurred after a person had been placed in a group, but prior to interaction with other members of his group. Similarly, Ryen and Kahn found that while own-group success increased OGB and own-group failure decreased it, a significant OGB effect occurred prior to actually playing the game and prior to even visual identification of own and other group members.

The finding that classification as a group member is sufficient to produce OGB can be explained by Heider's (1958) balance theory. Assuming that a person evaluates himself positively, and assuming that classification into a particular group implies a positive unit relation, then the situation can only be balanced if the person forms a positive sentiment relation with the group (ie., likes the group). Likewise, not being a member of a group would imply either the absence of a unit relation or a negative unit relation, and the situation would only be balanced if the person evaluated that group negatively or neutrally.

Recently, however, Rabbie and Horwitz (1969) have produced evidence inconsistent with the classification hypothesis. When Dutch high school boys were

arbitrarily formed into groups no evidence for an own-group preference was found, but when one group was rewarded and the other group not, the OGB effect emerged. They suggest that both classification and differential outcome are necessary to produce OGB.

One difference between those studies supporting the classification hypothesis and the Rabbie and Horwitz study is that in all but the Rabbie and Horwitz study the implication that groups would be competing was present. In the Sample and Botto study subjects were told the task would involve the formation of strategies, while in the Ryen, and Ryen and Kahn studies subjects were told they would be competing with the other group. Rabbie and Horwitz, however, in no way suggested even interaction with the other group: "In order to diminish any expectation that subjects would interact with one another, the experimenter stated that he had divided them into groups for 'administrative reasons only' that subjects would not work together in any way" (Rabbie and Horwitz, 1969, p.270). Thus, while subjects were distinctly identified as being either one group or another, the absence of potential interaction between groups and the meaninglessness of the division (from the subject's perspective) may have been sufficient to counteract the effects of classification. One purpose of the present study was to determine whether anticipation of competition is necessary for the occurrence of OGB. Half of the subjects in the present study were therefore led to expect competition between the groups, while the other half of the subjects anticipated cooperation.

Freedom of Choice and Group Identity

In the studies cited thus far subjects had no choice as to which group they were in, or for that matter, had no choice whether or not to be in a group. However, there is a large literature suggesting that a person's freedom of choice influences subsequent evaluations of choice alternatives (cf., Brehm & Cohen, 1962). To the extent a person is free to choose which group he will be a member of, the more he should come to enhance any positive features of his own group and degrade any positive features of a group of which he is not a member. In the present study three choice conditions were present: free choice, no choice, and choice denied. It was predicted that free choice would lead to greatest OGB, while having one's choice denied and being placed in the non-chosen group would lead to least OGB.

It was further expected that the more well-defined the choice alternatives the more impact the freedom of choice variable would have. Thus, if the two groups were identical it would make little difference whether one

had free choice or no choice as to which group he was a member, but if the two groups had distinctive characteristics then the choice becomes non-trivial.

METHOD

Subjects & Design

The subjects were 96 male undergraduate volunteers from introductory psychology courses at Iowa State University who received credit for their participation. The study comprised a 3 x 2 x 2 factorial design with eight Ss per cell. Independent variables were freedom of choice of group membership (free choice, no choice, and choice denied), type of intergroup interaction anticipated (cooperation or competition), and degree of group identity (high or low).

Overview

As S arrived he was sent to a waiting room where an assistant E instructed him to remain quiet while completing information cards. The experiment was begun when six Ss arrived. They were divided into two triads such that one member from each group was placed in one of three choice conditions. The entire triad served in one of two anticipation conditions and in one of the two group identity conditions. Each S was then administered the dependent measure, an eleven-item semantic differential scale, on which he evaluated both his own and the other group.

Division into Groups and Identity Manipulation

From the six Ss, individuals were taken one at a time and given the choice and identity manipulations. The first two Ss were allowed to choose their group and placed in the group of their choice (free choice condition); the second two Ss were asked to make a selection but the choice was denied, with the explanation that upon checking his records E discovered that particular group was already filled (choice denied condition); the final two Ss were assigned to a room and were given no choice in the matter (no choice condition). Both rooms were filled at the same time, and by giving the last two Ss no choice we were able to insure three Ss per group.

The doors to each of the two experimental rooms were either identical and completely free of any distinctive colors, symbols, or markings (low group identity condition) or distinctively labeled (high group identity condition) either "Civilians" or "Retailers." These labels were chosen after

a list of potential labels had been rated by male students not involved in the present experiment. Ratings were made in terms of preference and success of groups so labeled. The labels chosen for this study were equal on the success factor but were differentially preferred.

Anticipation Manipulation

Competition:

Ss were told that the experiment dealt with game behavior in a competitive situation. In order to make anticipation of playing the game more involving, it was fashioned on the order of a simulated football game. The two triads would be playing against each other, with the team winning the most games or outscoring the opposition by twelve total points was to be declared the winner.

Cooperation:

Ss were told that the experiment dealt with game behavior in a cooperative situation. Again, they were informed they would be playing a simulated football game, but were informed to work with the other-team (i.e., cooperate in the same way as the offensive and defensive squads work on the same team).

Experimental Rooms

The two experimental rooms in which the triads were housed were partitioned into three compartments by curtains which prevented Ss from seeing anyone entering or leaving the room. Thus Ss did not know the identity of the other members of their group. Ss were seated at tables such that each had easy access to the fake experimental apparatus, while still preserving anonymity. Instructions to both groups were given simultaneously by means of a microphone in a third room.

Dependent Measure

Following the anticipation manipulation the OGB measure was distributed. Ss were requested to rate both their own group and the other group using the following eight-point semantic differential scales: friendly-unfriendly; good-bad; unenthusiastic-enthusiastic; fair-unfair; insincere-sincere; close-distant; cold-warm; pleasant-unpleasant; flexible-rigid; supportive-hostile; and cheerful-gloomy. These bipolar adjective pairs were obtained from Osgood's evaluative dimension (Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957). The eleven items were summed separately for own-group and other-group evaluation. Since identical scales were employed in determining own-group and other-group ratings, the OGB score was obtained by subtracting the other-group score from the own-group score.

RESULTS

As a check on the anticipation manipulation, Ss were asked at the end of the study to rate to what extent their goal had been cooperation or competition. An ANOVA on responses to this measure showed the manipulations to be effective ($F = 22.88$, $df = 1/84$, $p < .001$). The results showed that anticipation of cooperation with members of the other group significantly reduced OGB ($F = 4.42$, $df = 1/84$, $p < .05$); however, even those Ss in the anticipated cooperation condition displayed a significant OGB effect, ($t = 4.73$, $df = 47$, $p < .001$).

Although a check on the freedom of choice manipulation revealed that the manipulation was successful ($F = 35.62$, $df = 2/84$, $p < .001$), no effects were found for this variable. The group distinctiveness manipulation proved unsuccessful.

DISCUSSION

The major finding appears to be that the mere anticipation of cooperation or competition can affect OGB. The literature is well-documented with studies demonstrating how actual competition increases own-group preferences (cf., Sherif, 1967) and this study gives evidence that anticipation of competition is sufficient for such an increase, even in extremely weak and ill-defined groups. The finding that those subjects in groups anticipating cooperation also showed a significant (although reduced) OGB effect offers further support for the balance theory interpretation that classification as a member of one group while exclusion from another group is sufficient to produce OGB and provides further support for Heider's theory. This study does not lend insight in Rabbie and Horwitz's (1969) failure to find OGB as a function of mere classification. However, Rabbie and Horwitz's failure to provide justification for the division into groups remains a plausible explanation.

While a literature is being developed dealing with the initiating causes and minimal conditions for OGB, it is unfortunate to note that very little has been done in the area of eliminating OGB. It is in this direction that future research on own group bias should be aimed. The relation of OGB to the social problems of ethnocentrism, discrimination, and prejudice seems to be direct and worthy of intensive investigation.

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